

News from Rep. Stephanie Herseth

For Immediate Release

Contact: Russ Levens, 202-226-4449

HERSETH SUPPORTS BILL TO FIGHT SPREAD OF FLU

With Vaccine Supplies Low, Legislation Ensures High Risk Residents Receive Priority

December 8, 2005, Washington, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Stephanie Herseth announced today her support for The Influenza Vaccine Emergency Act. Less than a month ago, it was reported that South Dakota had less than half of the flu vaccine it needs for our estimated 276,000 high-risk residents. While some hospitals and clinics have been receiving needed supplies recently, Rep. Herseth believes we need to ensure that in a health emergency, the government can act quickly and effectively to protect its most vulnerable citizens.

The Influenza Vaccine Emergency Act would give the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) more authority to acquire and distribute the influenza vaccine during a crisis. Herseth said, “We are well into the flu season and we have heard much about avian flu. With another year of flu vaccine shortages, it makes sense to outline a strategy for quickly dealing with a flu pandemic. Winter is upon us, and before long we will be dealing with the flu as well. In times of a health emergency, we need to act to protect our most vulnerable and high-risk residents including children and the elderly.”

In the case of a flu vaccine shortage or flu epidemic, Herseth’s bill provides that the Secretary of HHS would have the authority to seize vaccine supplies from manufacturers and distributors who are not in compliance with government distribution guidelines and distribute the vaccine.

At the start of the flu season state and federal officials assured the public that flu vaccine supplies were ample and encouraged all to get vaccinated after October 24. Unfortunately, just a few weeks later, the media began to report that clinics and hospitals were facing severe shortages.

Herseth is also a cosponsor of the Pandemic Preparedness and Response Act, which is designed specifically to ensure the federal government has the resources necessary to respond to a potential outbreak of avian or other wide-spread flu pandemic.

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Congresswoman Stephanie Herseth serves South Dakota in the U.S. House of Representatives. She is a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of moderate Democrats committed to fiscal discipline and strong national security, and is co-chair of the Rural Working Group, which is dedicated to raising the profile of issues important to rural America. She also serves on three committees vital to South Dakota's interests: Agriculture, Veterans' Affairs and Resources.